

REMARKS

In the Office Action, the Examiner rejected Claims 1-18, which were all of the then pending claims, under 35 U.S.C. §102 as being fully anticipated by a print out titled "Way Back Machine" (Collins) from a Web site. Claims 6, 12 and 18 were also rejected under 35 U.S.C. §112 as being indefinite. In addition, the Examiner objected to the specification and objected to terms in Claims 2, 6, 8, 12, 14 and 18.

Independent Claims 1, 7 and 13 are being amended to better define the subject matters of these claims. New Claim 19, which is dependent from Claim 1, is being added to describe preferred features of the invention. The specification and Claims 2, 6, 8, 12, 14 and 18 are being amended to address the Examiner's objections. The rejection of Claims 6, 12 and 18 under 35 U.S.C. §112 is respectfully traversed.

For the reasons discussed below, it is believed that all of the Examiner's objections to the specification and to the claims have been overcome. It is further believed that claims 6, 12 and 18 are clear and definite, and that all of Claims 1-19 patentably distinguish over the prior art and are allowable. The Examiner is, accordingly, asked to reconsider and to withdraw the objections to the specification and the claims, and the rejection of Claims 6, 12 and 18 under 35 U.S.C. §112. The Examiner is further asked to reconsider and to withdraw the rejection of Claims 1-18 under 35 U.S.C. §102, and to allow these claims and new Claim 19.

Before more specifically discussing the Examiner's objections and rejections of the claims, Applicant believes it may be helpful to present a brief overview of the present invention.

The Service Business all over the world is changing rapidly. Earlier it was looked upon as a cost center performing Sales support function. Many companies have transformed their service businesses into a profit center that fetches them steady revenue and profits.

The way the service business is done is changing rapidly. Earlier the service was mainly done through the OEM (Original Equipment manufacturer) employees and now the trend seems to be more of Service Franchising where the technical services are performed through small service companies and third party individuals like 'Man-In-the Van'.

Notwithstanding all these structural changes and new approaches in managing service business, the IT infrastructure is still lagging behind. For example, though some changes like Web based self service and Mobile dispatches have been implemented by many companies, there is still a lot more of work to be done. Information is Power, but in the current situation a lot of valuable data is either not collected or not shared. When the Service Organization has moved towards service franchising, little has been done to take the franchisees along with them. This could be done in several ways like:

1. Making them a part of the organization and using technology, sharing and getting necessary information for mutual benefit. The information sharing could be about the customers, their wants and needs, the product, the product behavior in market etc. Some information flow can be two-way and some one-way. Currently some information is fed to the franchisee and the dealers and little information is obtained from the field. In other words, there is no single integrated system available between the franchisee/dealer and all the divisions of an organization.
2. Most of the Service franchisee/dealer still use paper systems since they cannot afford to have an IT system on their own. This invention is aimed at hosting a system where, for example, the dealer/franchisee can log in and perform transactions of their own and also for the OEM. This will be like a virtual office for the franchisee who cannot invest in huge IT system. The system support will be provided by the OEM and the Dealer/Franchisee can use the system for a small monthly fee.

3. All the information from the Design, Quality, Sales and service departments of the OEM can flow directly to the dealer/franchisee and vice versa. A simple example is the field modification instructions to the franchisee/dealer and the flow of information from the field to the design and quality. Currently much of this information does not reach both parties.

4. The knowledge Management includes design changes, product improvements, recall information, failure trends, How to repair guides, Solution database, web based training, forecasting etc. Our invention will lead to a 'Information Autobahn' where there will be several exits to various departments of an organization. This will ensure a smooth flow of information for all.

In objecting to the specification, the Examiner specifically objected to the phrase "T & M etc," in paragraph [011], and required appropriate correction. As those of ordinary skill in the would recognize, "T & M" stands for "Time and Material," and this opportunity is being taken to amend paragraph [011] to change "T & M" to "Time and Material." Because this abbreviation is understood in the art, this amendment does not introduce new matter. The Examiner is thus asked to reconsider and to withdraw the objection to the specification.

The Examiner also objected to the phrase "date element" in Claims 2, 8 and 14, and to the phrase "spares sales" in Claims 6, 12 and 18. These claims are being amended to address the Examiner's objections. In particular, Claims 2, 8 and 14 are being amended to change "date" to "data," and Claims 6, 12 and 18 are being amended to change "spares sales" to "spare parts sales." It is believed that these changes fully respond to the Examiner's objections to the language of Claims 2, 6, 8, 12, 14 and 18, and the Examiner is asked to reconsider and to withdraw these objections.

In rejecting Claims 6, 12 and 18 as being indefinite, the Examiner specifically objected to the term "knowledge management."

The present invention relates to an integrated service management system that, for example, may be used to integrate several departments and processes of an organization such as Service marketing, Service call management, Service franchisee management, Spare parts sales, Warranty management of product and Spare parts and finally managing a database of knowledge resulting out of the lessons learnt in the field, the failure analysis, product design change needs that result in new and improved products.

In the existing scenario, there is no any integrated system available that can provide enterprise wide visibility to the various data elements in service and related document. Service management should not end with just solving an equipment problem in the field. The resulting failure, cause and repair data should be captured and seamlessly passed on to product design department and Production quality. The invention provides a method that may be used to capture and pass on the useful information from the field automatically through the system thereby reducing the work load on the field staff and other departments. The system may be designed in such a way that the product failure information, suggestions for product improvement, Quality related input etc are passed on to the various departments in real-time so that an organization can act faster to respond to the customer needs. This will result in quality products, customer satisfaction and profitability.

The term 'Knowledge management' encompasses several functionalities that includes data on failures, lessons learnt, remedial actions, solutions, product/service improvement suggestions and web based training etc. This data base may be open to the field staff, Service Franchisees and others on role based access basis for 24 hours a day, 7 days a week and 365 days a year. Currently no single system is available to harvest this knowledge seamlessly. The Knowledge may also comes from other sources like the design department who

wants to pass on critical information to the Quality department and Service personnel on field through product bulletins and general alerts and even product recalls. In the absence of an integrated system, many vital information and hence critical knowledge is lost in many organizations. This invention may be used to harness the knowledge data base so that it is beneficial to the entire organization.

In view of the foregoing discussion, the term "knowledge management," in the context of the present invention is clear and definite. Claims 6, 12 and 18 are thus not indefinite, within the meaning of 35 U.S.C. §112, and the Examiner is hence requested to reconsider and to withdraw the rejection of these claims under 35 U.S.C. §112.

With regard to the rejection of the claims over the prior art, Applicant has studied the website, www.shopcollins.com the archives and the user guides. It appears that this site is mainly intended for providing equipment, services offered information and some information for the dealers related to service.

The term 'Creating a database containing a plurality of service data element' has a larger meaning/coverage than the version of Collins website. The term 'User' in our invention is not necessarily limited to the customer or service department but may have a large coverage of users that includes franchisees, dealers, and several departments of the OEM including vendors, Quality, Design and Sales departments. Such a facility is not provided by Collins or other organizations.

Collins site doesn't offer the following outlined in preferred embodiment of the present invention:

A direct information flow from the field to Service, Design and Quality departments.

Collins only serves the parts sales, pricing information, standard technical publication, repair status and training opportunity identification. Per se, it does not offer constantly updated Web based training to dealers/franchisee and customer etc as may be done with this invention.

An important preferred feature of this invention will allow the Dealer/franchisee to view all the previous repair and customer information as a service call is received, facility to view recommended solutions related to the problem, allow them to enter all technical and billing information, pass on the field information to various OEM departments etc. Collins site also doesn't provide the facility to use the system as their virtual office where the dealer/franchisee can enter all their transactions and do a direct customer billing on behalf of OEM. It just records the status of the service calls and a facility for the end customer to view that information on Internet. In this invention, the complete service business transactions may be entered through an Intranet and necessary information may be shared by the OEM departments, customer and the franchisee.

Collins sites does keep a small record of the orders and shipping status but there are no indications that it contains the complete information about the machine, model, Structure, composition, version details, technical information, Install information and repair information.

The warranty information that may be used in this invention may have a larger scope that includes customer and supplier warranties for each assembly/part with complex rules like each assembly covered under different time or usage based warranty. In addition, the system will also have a schedule for the planned maintenance needed for the machine, the maintenance already completed and remaining etc.

The term 'User' in this invention may be, for example, a customer, potential customer or franchisee but it is not limited to the above mentioned only. It may have a large coverage of users that includes franchisees, dealers, and several departments of the OEM including vendors, Quality, Design and Sales departments. Such a facility is not provided by Collins or other organizations.

The similarity of Collins disclosure on access through Internet doesn't explain all. Apart from the regular application access Any modern system has to provide many users an easy access through an Internet or Intranet. In our Invention, the access is also provided through a Mobile handheld device.

While there is no disagreement over Collins providing services through a service provider, and provides access to them through the internet, it doesn't seem to provide the facility for the service provider to use the system and enter various transactions as outlined in the preferred embodiment of this invention. In Collins, the usage of the system by the service provider is limited. In the preferred embodiment of this invention, the service provider may be virtually an extended arm of the manufacturer performing various transactions apart from providing service to the end customer. For example, the service provider can print out standard contracts and sell it to the customer and keep a record of the services performed under this contract. He can take part in a recall campaign and many other activities of an organization apart from the limited activities outlined by Collins. This will allow a manufacturer to increase the revenue base using the service provider and also help expanding in to a every state, city and remote locations with the need to have company employees there by providing local employment.

Collins only provides generic information about pricing, bulletins, training information and Contacts. It doesn't provide facility for selling of Service Contracts and knowledge management that is not only a customer information but the entire knowledge about the product, repair methods, solutions, design changes, web based training etc. Collins uses the web only for establishing a contact and obtaining request from the customers and doesn't provide web based total self service. The preferred embodiment of this invention, the entire franchisee management including targets, forecasts, service provider performance, Overall performance metrics and warranty claims are managed online whereas Collins doesn't provide that facility.

As explained above, the preferred embodiment of this invention has a database that includes various processes of the total organization like design, Quality, Vendor, Franchisee and the service department. Some of the uses can be self service wherein the customer can access the system for trouble shooting on their own, searching and obtaining step by step instructions on Installation, service and repair of equipment for a nominal charge. The data base of Collins has limited scope whereas the preferred embodiment of this invention contains much more to integrate the total enterprise using data from various sources within and outside the organization.

The terms used in claims 8 and 14 are different than the limited database scope of Collins. A database may contain a few information about the customer and equipment as in Collins or as in our invention it may be a huge database getting data-streams from many sources within and outside the organization related to customer habits, usage patterns, failure causes, defects, solutions, trends, product recall information, field modification information. The preferred database of this inventions is aimed at providing reports like failure trend analysis,

buying patterns, customer satisfaction survey results and so on to various departments within a organization.

Any business revolves around Customer, Potential customer, franchisee. Though any one or all can be a user in a system, what needs to be looked at is what are the transactions performed by these on the system, what kind of information they receive from or provide through the system, what facilities does a system offer to any of the user. In our invention, the user has a larger scope of access in providing and receiving many information. The entire design is aimed at paperless office where all required information flows through everyone, limited only be role based access.

Modern systems should provide access through Internet web site since it is the most economical and efficient way of providing access. The similarity of providing an access through internet doesn't equate all the systems. It should be seen with the context of what type of access is being provided. In our invention, the access has a larger scope as outlined in our earlier paragraphs.

Normally the database is always provided by a manufacturer for single point of contact. In Collins, the service provider is authorized to service the products and access the system. The similarity ends here and in our system, the user has specific roles and transactions to be performed in the system that it totally integrated with rest of the functions within an organization. For example, if a product batch contains a defective spare part or assembly defect, our system can send out an early warning to all the franchisee with a single input of the model name an serial number range from the Product quality department. Since the entire system is programmed to send out real time information, the response time to avert a field catastrophe is very quick. It will also alert the Vendor or the part supplier to correct the situation in the

subsequent batches of production immediately. Such an integrated system is not in practice today and our invention is aimed at achieving this.

With respect to claim 12 and 18, the preferred embodiment of this invention covers a whole range of needs like complete franchisee management, Spare parts management & forecasting, and knowledge management that includes customer information, field lessons learnt, solution database and web based training etc.

Independent Claims 1, 7 and 13 describe important features not shown in or suggested by Collins. In particular, Claims 1 and 13 describe the step of providing the user with access to the database, and describe the feature that this access provides the user with a virtual office to enter a variety of transactions using data elements from the database. Claim 7, which is directed to a system for providing equipment service data, describes analogous apparatus limitations.

As indicated above, these features are of utility because they may be used to provide a user, such as a service provider, with enterprise wide visibility to a continuous stream of data and information.

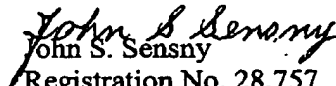
The other references of record have been reviewed, and these other references, whether they are considered individually or in combination, also fail to disclose or suggest this aspect of the present invention.

Because of the above-discussed differences between Claims 1, 7 and 13 and the prior art, and because of the advantages associated with those differences, these claims patentably distinguish over the prior art and are allowable. Claims 2-6 and 19 are dependent from Claim 1 and are allowable therewith. Likewise, Claims 8-12 are dependent from Claim 7 and are allowable therewith; and claims 14-18 are dependent from, and are allowable with,

Claim 13. The Examiner is, accordingly, respectfully requested to reconsider and to withdraw the rejection of Claims 1-18 under 35 U.S.C. §102, and to allow these claims and new Claim 19.

For the reasons set forth above, the Examiner is asked to reconsider and to withdraw the objections to the specification and to the language of Claims 2, 6, 8, 12, 14 and 18. The Examiner is also asked to reconsider and to withdraw the rejections of Claims 6, 12 and 18 under 35 U.S.C. §112 and the rejection of Claims 1-18 under 35 U.S.C. §102, and to allow Claims 1-19. If the Examiner believes that a telephone conference with Applicant's Attorneys would be advantageous to the disposition of this case, the Examiner is requested to telephone the undersigned.

Respectfully submitted,


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